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ABSTRACT

The BLBC (bilingual-bicultural) model of inter-ethnic communication is an effective method for bridging the instructional "gap" between classroom education and field experiences. These two learning experiences are distinct; yet each should complement the other. The BLBC model of inter-ethnic communication attempts to interface the student's classroom experience with actual field involvement. This model functions well because it views the communicator as an inter-ethnic specialist, it places perceptual skills in a bilingual-bicultural context, and it utilizes an ethnic aide concept in the classroom instruction procedures as well as in the field experience. (Author/CH)

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A CLASSROOM-FIELD MODEL OF INTER-ETHNIC COMMUNICATION

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A CLASSROOM-FIELD MODEL OF INTER-ETHNIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

An urgent need in inter-ethnic communication is the development of a workable model for communicative effectiveness. One of the problems here is finding an instructional approach that bridges the communication "gap" between classroom instruction and field application. Each area is distinctly unique yet each should compliment each other. The BLBC model of inter-ethnic communication attempts to interface the student's classroom experience with actual field involvement. It is a workable model because it views the communicator as an inter-ethnic specialist, it places perceptual skills in a bilingual-bicultural context and it utilizes an ethnic aide concept in the classroom instruction procedures as well as in the field experience.

Each of us marches to the beats of different drummers, and the beats we march to at various times emit discordant sounds within the mainstream of American life.

"Huelga!"
"Free enterprise!"
"Burn, baby, burn!"
"America! Love it or leave it!"
"Make love, not war!"
"We must honor our foreign commitments!"
"I have a dream!"
"Nigger! Coon! Spook!"
"Get Whitey!"

These are some of the sounds of our different drummers. We may call them beautiful sounds or we may call them ugly sounds. But we cannot dismiss the fact from our minds that these are the "now" sounds of diverse ethnic peoples trying to relate within the communicative framework of our democratic society.

One of America's unique cultural aspects is concern for the communicative expression of the individual. This concern manifests itself in the various political and governmental processes we have devised to protect the right of each of our citizens to practice freedom of speech. Visitors to our country are usually perplexed by this seemingly baffling communicative process. They cannot understand how it can operate without mass confusion. Yet somehow it continues to function, even if haphazardly at times.

Today, however, with all of our precautions to make the communicative process work to its maximum efficiency, freedom of speech seems to be disfunctioning for certain members of our country. Minority groups are beginning to question the validity of free expression. They are beginning to wonder if the sanctions of free speech are reserved mostly for the Anglo majority. To them, the Anglo's needs and wants seem to be heard much more readily by our political and governmental processes than theirs are. Consequently, these minority groups have been largely relegated to a position of disenfrancised citizens. Small pockets of ethnic peoples alienated from our democratic communicative processes so vital to their need of self-identification and group actualization within the larger cultural heritage of our country. These citizens have been placed in an environment of societal isolation in the ghetto, the barrio, and on the reservation. This isolation has polarized their feelings and needs into a distinct ethnic identity "Black is Beautiful", "Chicano", "True American"--these are some of the sounds certain ethnic groups are marching to in America today. And the frustrations they feel have expolded across the land in acts of violence, riots, and protests. This frustration has spilled over to another ethnic group, a segment of our angry youth. They have joined with the cause of these emerging minority groups, and the upstart of all this activity is activated in incidents like Watts, Kent State, Detroit, etc. These activities have tended to polarize ethnic groups even more, and the call is heard once more in ever resounding tones--"We must communicate more with each other." "We must find ways to open new processes of human expression within and between ethnic groups."

There is nothing new here, except the communicative perspective has changed. It has moved from a broad, national context to a more limited, more specific ethnic context. This context is frequently frightening to us, and it makes many of us bewildered because we are reluctant to change our ways in dealing with it. It is not easy to change established communicative processes. We feel secure with established communicative processes. But the communicative needs of our time insist on more responsive communicative processes--an inter-ethnic approach.

Man has always tended to understand how something works, or might work, by the use of models. Models have the capacity to place abstract concepts and ideas into a more concrete, physical relationship to the real world. A model can fix man's abstract thoughts in a permanent mold so the various parts of the process and the functions of those parts can be studied in a minute way. A good way to begin to approach inter-ethnic communication is to develop a model. By doing this, we can, at least, reach a common base of information from which to talk about the inter-ethnic communication process. We must remember, however, that there can be more than one way to view a process. The model we will talk about here is one way to view such a process.

In developing a model of inter-ethnic communication, it is essential to understand two viable definitions of culture. It is also essential to understand a viable definition of communication. One way to view culture is in a nation context. Culture could be defined here as the sum total of learned behaviors of a people of a particular national conviction which is transmitted from one generation to another as the heritage of that people.

Another way to define culture is in an ethnic context. From this perspective, culture could be defined as the sum total of learned behaviors peculiar to people of a particular ethnic origin which is transmitted from one generation to another as the heritage of that ethnic group. In both definitions, a characteristic of such learned behaviors is that they are susceptible to gradual and continuous change.

Communication could be defined as the art of understanding and being understood by people. When communication is being practiced within the communicator's own national culture it is intracultural. When it is being practiced within the communicator's own ethnic group it is intra - ethnic cultural. Conversely, when it is being practiced with the members of another ethnic group it is inter-ethnic cultural. However, these three cultural situations create a large difference. Here we will attempt to explain that difference.

Communication is also a learned behavior. The young member of a culture learns some of his communication behavior from his parents, family members and ethnic associates. This is only part of his communication training, however, He also learns some of his communication behavior from the cultural institutions of the nation of which his ethnic group is an integral part. Even though these two communication learning processes vary in their relative importance dependent on the immediate communicative needs of the young member, their purpose is to originate, perpetuate, and reinstate national and ethnic cultural values, expectations, and behaviors. They teach the member how to communicate within his own national and ethnic cultures, not outside of them.

In America, English is our national language. If the young member of our culture belongs to an ethnic group that speaks English, this should create no insurmountable problem. His associates within and without his ethnic group share a common means of language expression that is congruous in character. The member is encouraged to speak English so he can facilitate his communication behaviors across a wide range of societal groups within the broader context of his national culture. But what if the member belongs to an ethnic group that retains its ethnic language as a part of its ethnic identity? In the U.S. today, many American Indians and Chicanos still communicate to a large extent within their own ethnic groups via their own language, i.e. Navajo, Hoppi, Spanish, etc. In these ethnic groups, English may be an infrequently used language. A young member may not have associates within and without his ethnic group that share English as a common means of language expression that is congruous in character. The language of his ethnic group becomes the means of his communication behavior. He learns to speak Spanish or Navajo so he can facilitate his communication processes within his ethnic group, but he can have extreme difficulty when he attempts to facilitate his communication behaviors in his native language outside his ethnic group. Leonard Olguin (1969) makes a very interesting observation on this language discrepancy. He points out that the Chicano child, for example, when he enters school walks a thin line between the adobe wall and the red brick wall. When he is at home, he functions in the shadow of the adobe wall maintained by the Spanish language. When he is at school he disfunctions in the shadow of

the red brick wall maintained by the English language. He dis-functions because he is not able to use English effectively to facilitate his communication behaviors across an ever expanding number of societal groups outside of his own ethnic group.

Language facilitation is only one way to view a young member's communication learned behavior in American culture. Gestures and meanings of verbal and nonverbal languages are also learned. This includes such personal methods of communication as face-to-face speech, dance, drama, music, dress, and artifacts. It also includes impersonal methods such as the print, the film, radio, and television. Allthese aspects are uniquely cultural. Members of a particular culture know what reactions to expect from other members when they use verbal, nonverbal and visual expressions. When the experssions and meanings of a communicator are dissimilar to a people's culture, the communicator should expect the reaction of the people to be dissimilar to his own culture bound messages. Smith et al (1971) maintain that communication dissimiliarity is basically a part of the broader cultural milieu. In a sense, language is only a vehicle of expression of the broader attitudinal convictions of a particular peoples' ethnic concepts. Trans-ethnically speaking, a communicator fails not only because he does not speak the language of the particular ethnic group, but more importantly he does not know the verbal, nonverbal and visual expressions of the people he is trying to communicate with. The result is complete communication disfunction.

The mind of a communicator and of those in his audience are largely the products of their culture. The way receivers react to a message stimulus dissimiliar in ethnic content, and a communicator to feedback in this situation could be surprising to both.

Perceptual skills are important here. They are largely the results of cultural influence. Valdez (1963) points out that some basic contrasts in culture values between the Anglo-urban and Spanish folks are primarily perceptual in nature. For instance, Anglos may generally perceive Chicanos as not very competitive. They are imposing an Anglo-urban value concept upon the Chicanos. They do this because they lack theperceptual skills to be able to view them in a more competitive context; therefore dissimiliarity becomes the distinguishing factor between each ethnic group. It is perpetuated because neither ethnic group has acquired enough perceptual skills acuity to be able to distinguish between similiar-dissimiliar ethnic values in each group.

In an inter-ethnic context, perceptual skills are directly related to a communicator's ability to differentiate cultural concepts according to cognative, affective, and psycho-motor domains appropriate to a particular ethnic group. Segall et al (1966) have shown that people who live in forests and rural areas can perceive crooked and slanted lines more accurately than people who live in urban areas. Africans who live in jungles can perceive such lines more accurately than the Americans who live in cities like Los Angeles. This ability is a perceptual judgment of lines, and is related to the observer's congnative domain.

Olguin (1969) points out that Chicanos have a far greater tendency to gesticulate and touch people, especially from their own race, than Anglos or Blacks do. He believes they are motivated to a large extent by their affective domain, especially in their literature and music. One of the recurrent themes in these two art forms is affection, both personal and universal. This "bond of affection" is a positive motivational force, and they express it

through touch and gestures.

Smith et al (1971) maintain that Blacks have a highly developed affective domain. This domain is revealed in words like "soul", "brother", and "blood" as an extension of the "oneness of race" affinity. Also, Blacks have a highly developed psychomotor domain. When they dance, they show a remarkable sensitivity to the moods of the music coupled with a preciseness of physical coordination to the rhythms of the music.

The point is we tend to stereotype people from ethnic groups because we lack the perceptual skills to see them in the total interplay of their three personality domains. The Black man is athletic because of his physical strength and coordination. The Chicano man is affective because of his touching and gesticulation. The Anglo man is intelligent because of his industriousness and organizational ability. All of these stereotypes are false because they preclude specific domains from each ethnic man's total personality composite.

The Model

Effective communication occurs when the communicator obtains the desired response from his receivers. Ideally, this is not possible. You can only approximate the desired response in any given communication event. Too frequently in inter-ethnic communication, the communicator does not even approximate the desired response because he has overlooked two essential veriables: language facilitation and cultural facilitation. He encodes his message in his own verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual language. He imposes his own ethnic and nation value concepts upon his message. The message is conveyed through oneor more of his five senses. Finally it is transmitted through a medium. Allthis effort is done in a monolingual-monocultural context. The message

is received in a reverse order: medium, senses, and minds of the receivers. It is decoded by them in their own verbal, nonverbal and/or visual language. Once, again, this effort is done in a monolingual-monocultural context. At this point a communication gap is developing,and a communication breakdown could result because the language and cultural values of the communicator are uniquely his,and the language and cultural values of the receivers are uniquely theirs. Very little, if any, communication understanding may transpire. The communicator might try nonverbal language to account for his verbal inadequacy. Can you picture an American trying to communicate this way with some acquaintances from India? He would say "Hi." No response. Next, he might try putting his arm around the shoulder of one of them accompanied by the traditional American "A-OK" sign. Now if the person he touched is a female, he is in trouble. These actions in many Indian cultures would be interpreted as an invitation to bed.

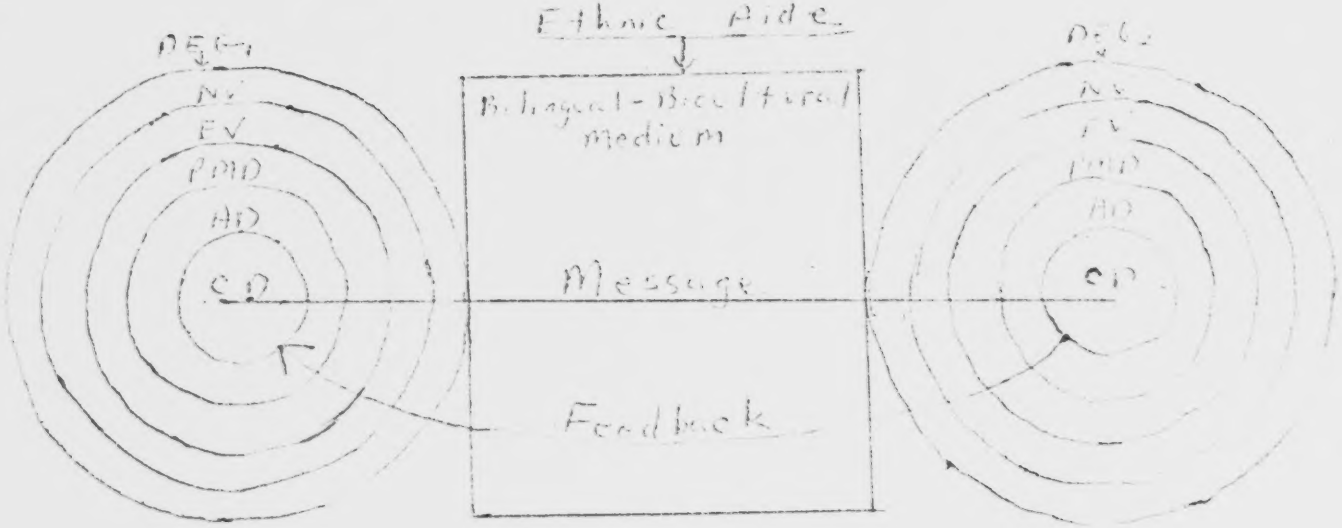
Even if the communicator and his receivers share a common language, he could run into communication difficulty. In America, the English language has been modified into various dialects. For example, Blacks in the ghetto speak a lingo strictly environmentally based. Words like catch (food), bread (money) create a cultural base of information exchange for them. To an outsider, it is virtually a foreign language. Here formal English may be infrequently used. Ghetto Blacks may catch a vague understanding of formal English words, but they relate and respond to their own ghetto English. In a sense, they have created a form of English which is uniquely ethnically based. A communicator should know their ghetto language if he wants to begin to communicate effectively with them.

Perhaps the most frustrating communication situation involving the monolingual-monocultural approach is in relating to Chicanos and American Indians. This is truly a bilingual-bicultural situation. In many areas in the U.S. Chicanos speak Spanish, and American Indians speak their tribal languages. Also, both ethnic groups adhere to their traditional folk society values and customs. In these situations, it is imperative that the communicator or the receivers (ideally both should fall into this category) should be bilingual and bicultural. Only then can the communicator begin to approximate the desired communicative response in his receivers. If both communicator and receivers share the same ethnic languages and they also share the same ethnic cultural experiences, then there is a better chance of understanding taking place. (See the following figure of the BLBC model of inter-ethnic communication.)

Since two persons are not alike even in the same culture, national or ethnic, the BLBC model could be applied to any communication situation. The model and the definition both imply that a person trying to communicate with the people of another ethnic group should first learn their native language and second, he should understand their intra-ethnic cultural ways and communication techniques. Then he should adapt his own communcative techniques to their culture.

This is a difficult task to undertake, but it is essential to the problems of inter-ethnic communication. There are a host of conceptual communication models that tellyou that the communicator must be sensitive to the attitudes, social systems, and cultural values of his receivers. Actually, they are all quite esoteric.

The BLBC Model of Inter-ethic Communication



DEG_{1-2} = Dissimilar ethnic groups
CD = Cognative domain
AD = Affective domain
PMD = Psychometer domain
EV = Ethnic values
NV = Nation values

They explain why it is important to know the diverse personality traits of your receivers, but they do little in showing you how to relate to those diverse personality traits. Perhaps the single beneficial aspect of these models is the concept that there is no such person as a universal communicator.

Let's accept that fact. The time is now to view inter-ethnic communicators as highly trained specialists. You don't ask a general practitioner of medicine to do brain surgery. Neither should you expect an untrained person to function adequately in an inter-ethnic communication situation. He just doesn't have the skills to do it effectively.

How can he acquire some workable inter-ethnic skills? It is primarily an educational problem. Today, most communication education concentrates to a large extent on communication theory and research. This approach prepares a person to be research oriented rather than practitioner oriented. Curriculi generally follow the same pattern. There is an abundance of theory and research courses with only a smattering of courses in inter-ethnic communication. The reasons for this are: (1) insufficient student interest in inter-ethnic communication, and (2) scarcity of trained personnel to teach these courses. Perhaps a way to begin to upgrade inter-ethnic communication in education today is to hire staff from minority ethnic groups, even though they do not possess the requisite academic degrees, and train them within the department in basic communication theory. Preferably these personnel should be bilingual and bicultural. If not, they should be trained so they can develop curriculi specifically for inter-ethnic communication situations in a bilingual-bicultural context. If the personnel need is met and viable courses developed, student

interest should increase in this vital area.

More field work experience by faculty and students is essential. They need to become involved with the people in ethnic communities. A work-study approach is needed here. Why not let the students study inter-ethnic communication problems in the classroom and then let them practice what they have learned in a ghetto, a barrio, or on an Indian reservation under faculty supervision? This should help to highlight discrepancies which exist between hypothetical and real inter-ethnic situations. After the faculty member and the students serve a period of time in the field, they return to the classroom to evaluate their experiences, modify their communication strategies, and return to the field for further practical application of what they have learned. This "learn by doing" technique might prove very beneficial and rewarding as a continuing education process in any educational experience.

In conjunction with the field approach is the ethnic aide concept. This should be cultivated. An ethnic aide is a person from the ghetto, the barrio or the Indian reservation who assists the instructor in the classroom. He is a resource person on cultural values unique to his ethnic group. He also participates with the students in designing communication strategies in the classroom and out in the field. The ethnic aide is the liaison link between the classroom and his own community. He is a vital element to the whole concept of inter-ethnic communication training because he is an extension of the composite personality of his ethnic community into the classroom. Also, he is the conveyor of the composite personality of a different ethnic group composed of the instructor and the students back into his own community. The

process of inter-ethnic communication could be greatly facilitated by the mutual trust the ethnic aide could generate within and between the two ethnic groups.

This is one way to begin the training of inter-ethnic communicators. Certainly there are other means to this end. The important things to remember are these: (1) An inter-ethnic communicator should have highly specialized training, (2) his training should heighten his perceptual skills in a bilingual-bicultural context, (3) he should have extensive exposure to an ethnic aide in the classroom and in the field. If communication education would begin to view inter-ethnic communication as a process unique in its field, better trained practitioners would result. We should begin to recognize the fact that nothing substantial willhappen in this area until we look upon the medium as the singularly most important aspect of the inter-ethnic communication model. Only when the communicator speaks the language of the dissimilar ethnic group and he understands their cultural expressions and their communicative techniques can he hope to facilitate the desired response from his receivers. Only then can he begin to orchestrate the diverse beats of our different drummers into a symphony of inter-ethnic understanding.

The Approach

Talking about an inter-ethnic communication model limits us to a theoretical discussion. We need to know how it works in an actual classroom-field situation. This part of the paper will report on the use of the ELBC model in an experimental course taught by the author entitled "Communication Problems in Ethnic Groups" at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California.

Specifically, the course was offered by the Speech Communication Department through University extension. It was designed to isolate community and/or institutionally based ethnic problems unique to a particular situation, and it attempted to apply communication techniques within the framework of the ethnicity of that particular situation. The course has been taught three times to three distinct groups: (1) selected staff and inmates of the Paso Robles School for Boys of the California Youth Authority, (2) Teacher Internship Trainees for Migrant Education, and (3) selected staff, teachers and parents of the Santa Maria School District, Santa Maria, California. In each teaching situation, a random mix of ethnic backgrounds was attained between Anglos, Blacks and Chicanos. This mix was assigned as intact groups by the institutions involved, and the make-up of each group generally followed a 30% Anglo, 30% Black and 30% Chicano breakdown. The educational backgrounds of the individuals in the groups ranged from high school freshman to Masters Degree level. Their ages ranged from 14 to 52 years, and there was an almost even aplit on sex--52% males and 48% females.

Isolation of the ethnic communication problem areas unique to each class was obtained by the use of open-ended discussions. Each class decided on <u>five</u> problem areas, and ranked them in importance from one through five.

Basically the format for each of the ethnic communication problem areas for each class followed the same procedure. Participants in each of the three classes were divided into five groups, for a total of 15 groups overall. Each group contained six individuals, with an equal mix of males-females as was possible in the total make-up of each class. All the groups in each of the classes chose <u>one</u> of the selected ethnic communication problem

areas. Special interest in the problem by the group members was the primary selection criterion.

Once an ethnic communication problem area was selected by a group, its members had to fit it into a role-playing scenario context. To do this, they had to establish the following criteria:

(1) identify the exact nature of the ethnic based communication problem.

(2) identify the basic symbolic processes operating within the ethnic based communication problem.

(3) arrange the ethnic based communication problem and its basic symbolic functions into a dramatized scenario.

(4) create essential roles which could be enacted within the dramatized scenario.

(5) use an ethnic aide in creating communication strategies.

A Case in Point

It is not possible here to elaborate on all of the ethnic based communication problems investigated in each of the classes. For brevity, let us look at a particular problem to see how the established criteria operated.

This particular problem occured in an elementary school in the Santa Maria School District. The school had a student enrollment of about 40% Chicanos, with the rest of the student body Anglos. The crux of the problem involved a number of Chicano students and three or four of the Anglo teachers. It seems that the teachers complained that the Chicano students were disrespectful to them, and the Chicano students stated that the teachers were indifferent toward them. Repeated discussions between the administration, the teachers and the students involved were not

fruitful in identifying the cause of the problem. Eventually, the situation reached an impasse. The Chicano students' parents boycotted the school, refusing to send their children back until the teachers involved were fired. At a meeting with the school board, the people involved agreed that the Chicano students would return to school if more effective means of understanding between ethnic groups would be established.

With this background information, the group reconstructing this ethnic communication problem had to first identify the exact nature of the problem. They did this in two phases. The first phase was a discussion among the group members, composed of two of the Anglo teachers involved in the situation, two of the Chicano parents also involved in the situation, and two Blacks not involved in the situation. In phase two, the group interviewed selected people, teachers, administrators, students, and parents knowledgeable about the situation. On the basis of the information gathered, the group members decided that the exact nature of the problem involved certain ethnic misconceptions of both the Anglo and the Chicano cultural heritage in teaching children respect for adults. The crux of the situation was a matter of eye contact. When reprimanded by the Anglo teachers, the Chicano students looked at the floor, instead of looking them in the eye. The teachers interpreted this as disrespect, when actually it was a show of respect for adult authority by the Chicano students.

The same technique previously used to identify the exact nature of the problem was used to identify the basic symbolic functions operating within the ethnic based communication problem. The group found that two basic symbolic functions were causing the ethnic misconceptions. One was a bilingual malfunction. The Anglo teachers knew very little Spanish, and the Chicano students

had a limited facility with English. This bilingual difficulty helped to create the second ethnic misconception--misunderstandings over bicultural societal values. The Chicano students were operating from Spanish folk societal value concepts, and the teachers were operating from Anglo middle-class societal value concepts.

At this point, the group decided that an outside person, not involved with the group problem, was needed to assist them in establishing a more in-depth understanding of the two basic ethnic misconceptions. This person had to have a workable fluency in both the English and Spanish languages, including an understanding of the societal value concepts of the two distinct ethnic groups. This person was called an ethnic aide. Through the efforts of the school admisistration, a person was secured from the community who served as the ethnic aide for the group.

The next step in the process was to reconstruct the problem in a scenario context. With the help of the ethnic aide, the group established a role-playing format, including the various roles to be enacted, with a loosely constructed scheme of the spoken dialogue both in Spanish and in English. It should be pointed out here that a scenario is an outline of a dramatic action, starting with a basic human situation, intensified by complications, which must be resolved in some way through human interaction. The dialogue is primarily spontaneous, however certain cue lines can be written out and memorized by the role-players so that the dramatic action can progress to an ultimate conclusion. In a bilingual-bicultural situation, it is essential that the dialogue be in both languages if the role-players are to acquire a greater appreciation of the intrinsic feelings and modes of expression inherent in each language. Here the ethnic aide was very helpful in assisting the

role-players to learn some basic communication aspects of a language unfamiliar to them. Specifically, an Anglo teacher, playing the role of a Chicano parent, would work from a written script until she learned the Spanish expressions. Once she learned the expressions, she could converse in Spanish. Likewise, the Chicano parent would follow the same procedure in English. The ethnic aide would assist the role-players in any language pronunciation, rhythm or meaning difficulties encountered in the role-playing situation.

The same technique was used in the scenario contest. For example, one scenario involved the Anglo teacher reprimanding the Chicano student. The first run through was straight. A Chicano from the group would role-play the student, and an Anglo from the group would be the teacher. Next the situation was reversed. The Chicano would play the teacher speaking English, and the Anglo would play the student speaking Spanish. The ethnic aide would assist the role-players until they had reached a level of proficiency to carry on by themselves. Each scenario was observed by the group; and when it was concluded, the group and the ethnic aide discussed the significant bilingual-bicultural aspects to ascertain where communication breakdowns occured. One of the important bicultural aspects which came out of this scenario was a societal value concept. Group members began to realize that the Chicano child's authority concept was different than the Anglo child's authority concept. In the Spahish folk society, the father is dominant, and the mother is submissive. Children are taught respect for both, but the mother has a special place. She, and females in general, are to be shielded, protected, especially by the males. The authority figure is the father. Males must be

strong and resolute, and Chicano children are taught to respond primarily to male authority, rather than female authority. On the other hand, middle-class Anglo children are raised in a partnership authority concept. The mother makes as many decisions as the father, and women, in general, are not as protected in a traditional sense as Chicano women are. Here women have a much stronger authority concept. Therefore, at times it is difficult for Chicano children to respond favorably to the female teacher authority image in the classroom. Female Anglo teachers may misinterpret the deference accorded them by Chicano children as a sign of disrespect, indifference, or even rudeness, especially if they do not look them in the eye when reprimanded.

This is only one of the ethnic misconceptions with subsequent communication breakdown illuminated by this approach. Others could be listed here, i.e. the box-toed shoes worn by many Chicanos as a vestige of the days of the caballeros, not the "greaser" image it is supposed to represent, or the physical touching, even among male Chicanos, as normative behavior rather than supposed "effeminancy." However, this should give us an overview of this inter-ethnic communication technique and how it can operate within a community framework.

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